

APR 23 2003

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Legislature funds share of cleanup



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Enabling legislation to provide for Montana's share of the approximate \$100 million dollar asbestos cleanup has passed both the House and Senate and was transmitted to the governor on April 17.

The asbestos cleanup at Libby has been one of the top priorities facing Montana, and the "silver bullet" designation increasing Montana's ranking on the Superfund National Priority List has made it even more critical that Montana prove her ability to meet state commitments under the EPA provisions.



Legislature

2003

Despite the state's current revenue shortfall, Montana, through use of revenue from the Resource and Groundwater Assessment Tax, can now provide the

necessary match to trigger the extensive cleanup necessary to reverse the environmental damage done by vermiculite mining and processing in Lincoln County.

According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, full scale cleanup could not progress until Montana provided assurance it could meet its 10 percent commitment to pay its share of costs of asbestos removal from contaminated homes and yards in Libby and Troy.

Authority to issue general obligation bonds to cover such reclamation costs already exists in state statutes, but legislative authority had to be granted to provide a revenue stream for the repayment of the bonds. The revenue is generated from taxes imposed on the gross value of coal, vermiculite and other minerals.

Other programs are funded from those same taxes, and agencies impacted from diversion of this funding worked with the Budget Office to meet the challenge of finding ways to finance the state share of the Libby cleanup without crippling other existing activities.

The proposal incorporated in House Bill 10, sponsored by Rick Maedje, seemed the most viable way to provide the necessary funding. Before House and Senate actions, provisions of the bill were scrutinized and supported by the Finance and Claims, House Appropriations and Long Range Planning committees.

The costs estimated at \$60 million to \$70 million for Libby and \$10 million to \$15 million for Troy would place the state share between \$7 million and \$8 million. The original plan was a state bond issuance of \$9 million this biennium, but to minimize the impact on other projects, it has been lessened to \$5 million, which will require only about \$430,000 for debt service this biennium and will not hinder the project operations.

Curtiss, a Fortine Republican, represents Senate District 41.